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PREF

SUBJECT: DCM HIGHLIGHTS U.S. ASSISTANCE TO VULNERABLE POPULATIONS ON
PACIFIC COAST

1.(U) SUMMARY: During a May 7-8 trip to Cali and Buenaventura, the Deputy Chief of Mission met with business community members, local officials and Naval and Coast Guard senior leadership. Other events focused on issues for Afro-Colombian and internally displaced persons (IDPs) communities. The DCM spoke to Afro-Colombian student leaders at the University Santiago de Cali, the National Network of Afro-Colombian Women, and visited USAID-funded micro-credit and IDP counseling programs. The visit highlighted U.S. assistance to improve the quality of life for vulnerable groups, security issues and state of the economy. END SUMMARY.

UNIVERSITY VISIT HIGHLIGHTS AFRO-COLOMBIAN LEADERSHIP

12. (U) The DCM, accompanied by ECONOFF, visited the Universidad Santiago de Cali on May 7th. Chairman of the University Board Jefferson Ocoro and Ebano magazine editor Essaud Urrutia made introductory remarks, followed by the DCM's remarks. About eighty students who made up the Afro-Colombian leadership group were present.

13. (U) Ocoro and Urrutia highlighted the importance of academic and trade ties to the U.S. and Colombia's positive steps toward inclusivity. The DCM offered remarks on what motivated him to join the Foreign Service, and discussed scholarships, such as the Martin Luther King scholarship and other academic programs in the U.S. The students then engaged the DCM in a question/answer session on U.S. foreign policy and U.S. support for Afro-Colombians and other vulnerable groups.

NATIONAL NETWORK OF AFRO-COLOMBIAN WOMEN DISCUSS FUTURE ASSISTANCE

14. (SBU) The DCM met with the five members of the National Network of Afro-Colombian Women, including President Aura Dalia Caicedo Valencia. A great percentage of IDPs are Afro-Colombian women, and many children are also included in that category as victims of armed conflict. Projects they are working on within the Afro community include: setting up a political action group, encouraging more Afro-Colombian women political candidates, improving living conditions of Afro-Colombians, and fighting discrimination. They also noted the upcoming launch of a leadership training program for Afro-Colombian women that they hope to expand throughout the country. The DCM responded that an integral policy towards Afro-Colombians that encompasses health, security, and economic possibilities is needed to respond to these issues, but that achieving concrete and significant progress will be a long process. He also noted the growing dissatisfaction of many Afro-Colombian constituencies and their elected leaders, in large part due to scandals and corruption.

15. (SBU) EconOff asked about that status of a housing project going

forward in Buenaventura that aims to relocate Afro-Colombians whose homes are threatened by flooding. The women stated that the community does not wish to relocate as the move does not benefit them in any way, and moves them farther away from the sea, where most of them earn their living. They also asked that the Embassy follow up on the results of U.S. assistance in general because there are projects where assistance doesn't reach its intended recipients.

MAYOR POINTS TO YOUTH DELINQUENCY, GUN CONTROL, AND ARMED CRIMINAL GROUPS AS TOP PROBLEMS

¶16. (SBU) Cali Mayor Jorge Ospina, along with Johania Marulanda, Director of Planning and Efraín Sierra, Undersecretary of Security explained to the DCM the challenges facing their city. The Mayor's city pride campaign and transportation and educational programs have improved the city's image, he said. Cali's unemployment rate is stable but some industries have been affected by the global economic crisis. However, Ospina is worried about the rate of violence, which is higher than other Colombian cities at 417 murders this year. Ospina pointed to three major factors affecting crime in Cali: juvenile delinquency, trafficked arms, and the reinsertion of armed former paramilitary and guerilla elements into society.

¶17. (SBU) Juvenile delinquency is growing according to the Mayor. Children start out with small crimes and move to more serious crimes

as they get older, and is also a problem amongst Cali's IDPs. Second, Ospina said imported firearms are used in 85% of murders in Cali, which leads him to believe it is a transnational problem. The third problem is hired killers associated with "oficinas de cobro", or criminal debt collectors, which have not yet risen to the level of a mafia in Cali but are a growing problem. Crime problems are complex and there is a lack of resources to combat them, Ospina said. Security official Sierra believes the Embassy could help Cali in the area of combating youth delinquency, specifically by assisting in a review of the judicial system and how it treats youth crimes. The national system of registry of arms is also not functioning as it should. The DCM commented that the Embassy has several experts that can assist on these issues.

¶18. (SBU) The DCM asked Ospina about his office's assistance for IDPs in Cali. The Mayor stated that there are 40,000 IDPs in Cali from the Pacific Coast and that Cali is having trouble absorbing them all. The DCM inquired about two displaced groups in Cali from the Brisas de Navarro and Brisas de Cordoba neighborhoods. Ospina responded that there is housing and social assistance available to those IDPs who register, but 80% of those people did not alert the proper office for assistance when they were displaced. The registration process is very long, involving a certification and verification process by Accion Social, which the mayor's office has no control over. Some IDPs have invaded residential areas and refuse to leave, so they plan another displacement next week. The Mayor stated he has a no-tolerance policy for illegal land seizures. He mentioned that some 3,000 homes are under construction for IDPs in Cali and that churches run short-term housing programs for the interim.

¶19. (SBU) Ospina requested the removal of soccer team America de Cali, a strategic symbol of the city, from the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list. Ospina claimed some of the team's former investors were not involved in narco-trafficking and would like to invest again in the team. The DCM responded that Embassy awaits the new list of investors so it can confirm the origins of the team's new resources.

JOHNSON & JOHNSON SALES REMAIN STABLE

¶10. (U) The DCM met with Johnson & Johnson Sales and Marketing president Rosana Padilla and was given a tour of the plant by Director of Operations Julian Irurita. Johnson & Johnson sales this year have remained steady. While large chains like Exito had a bad

trimester, Johnson & Johnson has seen an increase in sales to "mom and pop" stores. Padilla expressed some concern over the security situation in Cali and decreasing U.S. assistance, pointing to the exodus of Cali businesses to Bogota during the years when the FARC were more active.

¶11. (U) Padilla noted Johnson & Johnson partners with NGOs on HIV and nutrition programs. She expressed interest in the DCM's suggestion to work with American contacts in Cali to further develop charitable programs.

FINANCE MINISTER ZULUAGA CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

¶12. (U) At a panel discussion organized by the Cali Branch of the Colombian-American Chamber of Commerce, Finance Minister Oscar Ivan Zuluaga, National Planning Director Esteban Piedrahita, Sugar Producers Association President Luis Fernando Londoo and Colombina President Cesar Caicedo were guardedly optimistic about Colombia's macroeconomic outlook in the face of the global downturn. Zuluaga noted a recent IMF report that estimated Colombia's GDP growth would be zero in 2009 and 1.6 percent in 2010. The report said Colombia's structural reforms and sound macro policies put the country in a better position than most to pursue countercyclical fiscal policies in addition to interest rate cuts.

¶13. (U) Zuluaga added that national debt remained at very manageable levels and reserves had increased from January to April. Zuluaga's response to Londoo's question of why Colombia had not cut interest rates more quickly to address unemployment, which reached 12 percent in March, was that rates probably would come down more. From 2006 through mid-2008, there was a very real danger of inflation, but Colombia could take advantage of the current crisis to further dampen inflation expectations and achieve inflation rates of less than four percent in the coming years. The panelists generally agreed that Colombia would meet its 2009 inflation target of 4.5 to 5.5 percent. Caicedo noted the importance of Colombia's

investment-promotion policies, such as free trade zones, particularly in a time of economic downturn when businesses are being more cautious with investment decisions.

PORT COCAINE SEIZURES ALREADY UP 200% OVER 2008

¶13. (SBU) The DCM toured Buenaventura Port with Port Commander LTC Giovanni Zamudio, who demonstrated the methods anti-narcotics police use to detect drugs during cargo, container, and sugar and coffee inspections. The DCM also visited the National Coffee Federation's export quality control facility. Buenaventura Port is one of the six major Colombian ports that are signatories to the Embassy-supported Port Security Program. There are approximately 100 anti-narcotics police stationed at the Port of Buenaventura. Sixty percent of Colombia's exports pass through Buenaventura, making it a target for drug smuggling operations. In 2008, the Buenaventura Port antinarcotics police seized over 2,000 kilos of cocaine out of a total of 30,000 kilos of cocaine seized at all of Colombia's ports. This year to date, the unit has already seized approximately 6,000 kilos of cocaine.

¶14. (U) The DCM also toured Colombian Coast Guard facilities, led by Navy Captain Carlos German Rodriguez. Buenaventura is the headquarters for the Pacific Coast Command which includes two other stations located in Bahia Solano and Tumaco. In 2009, NAS began providing training, tactical advice, and operational support to the Colombian Coast Guard. As of January 1, 2009, the Pacific Coast Guard Command has been responsible for the seizure of 20,597 kilos of cocaine and 7,174 kilos of marijuana. Captain Rodriguez commented that drug smugglers are constantly improving their capabilities. Semi-submersible craft are now capable of making the journey from Buenaventura to Mexico in seven days, half the time as before.

MICRO CREDIT PARTICIPANTS DEEM PROGRAM SUCCESSFUL

¶15. (U) Mujeres Ahorradoras was begun in 2007 as micro-credit

project with technical cooperation from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Inter-American Institute of Cooperation for Agriculture. USG provides approximately \$383,000 in technical support for 800 women's families in Buenaventura. The eight participants present believed the program had dramatically improved their lives, allowing them to use micro-credit to save money to reinvest in their small businesses, ranging from cleaning to food products. They have even started their own social project to educate their community about birth control, education, and savings. One drawback of the program according to the women is that Colombian banks charge high transaction fees which makes saving difficult.

VISIT HIGHLIGHTS ASSISTANCE TO IDPS

¶16. (U) The DCM visited Fundacisn Arquitecturando, the local operator for a PRM-funded Gender-Based Violence (GBV) program. This program was piloted by CHF International last year and is now being integrated into several sites. The program's objective is to combat GBV among internally displaced persons in the cities of Buenaventura, Cali, Pasto, and Pereria by providing access to counseling and housing assistance. Director Edgar Rodriguez gave a presentation detailing Fundacion Arquitecturando's assistance to IDPs. Participants had the opportunity to share their stories. Most expressed appreciation for the program. The number of families supported ranges by program, but about 850 families receive support through the housing program.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PRESS COVERAGE

¶17. (U) Local and national press interviewed the DCM at the Universidad Santiago de Cali and the mayor's office. The DCM highlighted these events as good examples of bilateral dialogue and USG support for vulnerable groups. Placements included the following pieces: "Deputy Chief of Mission In Cali Yesterday", El Pais (leading Cali daily, weekly readership: 145,000); "Vice Ambassador Visits Cali", Caracol Radio (765,100 listeners); "Vice Ambassador Brian Nichols Thinks TLC is a Possibility", Caracol Radio; "Minister-Counselor Arrives in Cali", Red Sonora (local radio station); and "American Chamber of Cali and US Embassy Activities" on El Tiempo's internet site (12 million average monthly hits).

BROWNFIELD